Review
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which even the liberal democracies resorted to war crimes is unclear. It is no clearer whether Hajj Amin was primarily an Arab nationalist or some variety of Islamist. That these remain open questions is a reflection of the fact that Hajj Amin wrote little, and beyond the wartime propaganda broadcasts, which might have been written for him, he made few public speeches. To Pappé's credit, he has not attempted to read more into the sources than they tell us.

Overall, he has produced a fine book that is informed by the best scholarship and written with directness and celerity. It is a book that scholars of the modern Arab world and of the Arab-Israeli conflict should read and also assign to their students.

WELDON C. MATTHEWS
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So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism. By JAMES R. FICHTER. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010. 400 pp. $35.00 (cloth).

In the established canon of the history of Asia, the United States is at best a footnote until the second half of the nineteenth century. Jame's Fichter's *So Great a Proffit* does much to reevaluate the politics of trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (ca. 1783–1815) and suggest an important role for the new nation. Extensively empirically researched, this book meticulously documents the activities of American traders and how they interacted with other traders in the East Indies, a term Fichter applies in an imprecise, premodern sense to encompass everything from Cape Town east to Nagasaki.

Certainly, there have been many studies of American shipping in the long eighteenth century. The unique contribution of this book is its relatively broad geographic scope, so that rather than one port, like Salem or Philadelphia, or one commodity, such as tea or tin, American shipping to and from Asia in its entirety is examined. This is in turn scrutinized in comparison to European, primarily English, shipping. Fichter provides especially new and valuable insights by carefully documenting re-export data to give a view of American trade that is both broader and more precise. He shows how early American merchants were able to exploit their neutrality for profit.

Fichter is a clear and clean writer, relying very little on jargon, making the book very accessible to non-expert readers. Moreover the

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liberal lacing of individual case studies with economic fact balances a learned presentation with engaging readability. Stories of individual traders such as Jacob Crowninshield, who purchased, transported, and sold a port-drinking elephant from India, the first pachyderm to come stateside (pp. 103–105), make rich and textured reading. Nevertheless, there are places where one wishes for a more judicious use of jargon. For example, "capitalism" is a loaded word, and Fichter has used it very broadly, completely avoiding any Marxist look into modes of production or development from feudalism. Instead he uses it to refer strictly to financial capital, apparently using it as a synonym for mercantilism. While no book should be faulted for not being another book, the use of "capitalism" is somewhat misleading. Similarly, the "great divergence" between East and West is discussed but not defined despite a lack of consensus on when this occurred. However, because this book is more empirical than theoretical, these issues don't significantly affect the argument.

Fichter aimed very high in this geographically broad, source-rich project. It is inevitable that a few of his arrows might fall short. Specifically, the fact that Fichter approaches trade from the point of view of an Americanist is both his strength and his weakness. He provides many fascinating insights that will benefit any historian of this time period because he provides new information and a new way to evaluate events. Nevertheless some aspects of Asian trade and commodities might have benefited from more secondary literature. The lack of a bibliography, perhaps an editorial decision, makes this issue difficult to evaluate, but in his effort to hunt down a truly impressive array of primary source material, a number of major secondary sources, like those by Els Jacobs or Kristof Glamann, seem to have been neglected. These readings might have prevented assumptions such as, for example, that Malabar pepper and Sumatran pepper were interchangeable.

Fichter's story begins, appropriately for an American story, with tea. In a very different story from that told in U.S. history textbooks, we find how American merchants navigated both the economics and the politics surrounding the Tea Party, with varying degrees of success. Chapter 2, "America Sails East," looks at motivations and formations of shipping. Silver trade in the global economy is examined. Chapter 3 looks at trade during the so-called "French Wars" between 1793 and 1814 and shows how American traders were able to exploit the internecine quarrels in Europe to their own advantage. Chapter 4 is appropriately titled "America's Reexport Boom." Detailed analysis is provided for pepper and tea accompanied by less detailed analyses of other commodities. Chapter 5 consists of short case studies of the busi-

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ness models and fates of individual merchants. The following three chapters examine the American role of trade in India and East Asia, and chapter 10, the last before the conclusion, places trade in the context of financial capital and developments in banking.

If Fichter's conclusion that "trade was concomitant with the financial—rather than the industrial—transformation of the Anglo-American world" (p. 279) is not startling (the rise of the Dutch East India Company is in part associated with the development of banking in the Netherlands), it is new and relevant in this specific context. The phrase "this is an important book" is probably as ubiquitous in reviews as "I love to laugh" is on dating site profiles. Nevertheless it is apt here, regardless of the book's faults. It is a triumph of empiricism in a theoretically driven world, going far beyond the modest goal of documenting "Anglo-American capitalism." Fichter mined a vein that looked less than promising and showed that it had great riches to offer to almost any historian of the long eighteenth century.

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Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867. By ILYA VINKOVETSKY. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 272 pp. $49.95 (cloth).

Ilya Vinkovetsky's *Russian America* follows a number of recent scholarly works addressing Russia's only overseas colony. The subject has proved contentious for historians both in Russia and North America, with Lydia Black's synoptic and polemical *Russians in Alaska, 1732–1867* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004) serving as a lightning rod for discussion. In many ways Vinkovetsky's new book, which covers the second half of Russia's hundred-plus years in the New World, takes the opposite approach from Black. *Russian America* is a dispassionate, technical autopsy of the structures and practices that gave strength to the Alaskan empire. In these goals the book is eminently successful, and it will likely serve as the standard work on the subject for many years. Just as importantly, Vinkovetsky for the first time has made a strong case for Russian America's inclusion in broader discussions of European empires.

Vinkovetsky takes as his starting point not the traditional question about Alaska—why did the Russian empire in America fail?—but rather, what structures allowed it to persist for so long? *Russian*

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